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Weir, T. H. (2013). The Specter of “Godless Jewry”: Secularism and the “Jewish Question” in Late 19th-Century Germany. *Central European History*, 46(4), 815-849. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938913001295>

Published in:
Central European History

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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The Specter of “Godless Jewry”: Secularism and the “Jewish Question” in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany

Todd H. Weir

WHEN asked to provide his own “solution to the Jewish Question” for a 1907 survey, the journalist and philosopher Fritz Mauthner responded, “I do not know how to give an answer to your question, because I do not know which Jewish question you mean. The Jewish question is posed differently by every questioner, differently at every time, differently at every location.”¹ While untypical for its time, Mauthner’s viewpoint is shared by many scholars who write today—not one but a myriad of “Jewish Questions” proliferated in nineteenth-century Germany and, indeed, across the globe. The dramas they framed could be transposed onto many stages, because talk about the purported virtues and vices of Jews had the remarkable ability to latch onto and thereby produce meaning for a wide range of public debates. By plumbing this excess of meaning, scholars have teased out some of the key dynamics and antinomies of modern political thought. No longer focusing solely on conservative antisemitism, they have examined the role of the “Jewish Question” in other political movements, such as liberalism and socialism, and in the conceptual elaboration of the state, civil society, and the nation.² Cast in ambivalent roles at once powerful and vulnerable, familiar and foreign, the figure of the Jew acted as a lightning rod for imagining such collectivities. Opposing parties shared

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the Stroum Jewish Studies Program of the University of Washington, Vanderbilt University, the University of Marburg, and at the conference “Beloved Enemy: Philosemitism in History,” at the Moses Mendelssohn Center, Potsdam. Thanks are owed to Michael Rosenthal, Helmut Walser Smith, Jochen-Christoph Kaiser and the other participants at these events. I am also grateful to Ari Joskowicz, Uffa Jensen, and the anonymous reader of *Central European History* for helpful suggestions. The essay is dedicated to the memory of my uncle John McMillan, who read it and applied his skills as a longtime newspaper editor to indicate where I might rephrase overly stuffy sentences in plain English. He will be missed.

¹Julius Moses, ed., *Die Lösung der Judenfrage. Eine Rundfrage* (Berlin: C. Wigand, 1907), 144.

²Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

common assumptions, such as the tacit understanding that integration into the nation, state, or civil society required a self-transformation of Jews, something historians have referred to as the “emancipation contract.”³ Generally speaking, it was the terms of this contract rather than its form that divided liberals from conservatives, philo- from antisemites, and Jews from non-Jews in the nineteenth-century. Accordingly, scholars now increasingly approach the “Jewish Question” not merely as an example of prejudice, but rather as a framework through which multiple parties elaborated their positions.⁴

This essay concerns the “Jewish Question” of one modern movement—worldview secularism—as it emerged in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. Secularism encompassed the anticlerical movements affiliated with the political left, which sought not merely the separation of church and state, but also the replacement of Christianity by an immanent, natural scientific worldview. In the course of conducting research into the history of German secularism, I found that the “Jewish Question” popped up in the sources in initially surprising, but upon further inspection, quite systematic patterns. Antisemites regularly spoke of “godless Judaism,” while liberal and Jewish secularists wrestled over the issue of Jewish difference in a movement whose naturalistic worldview was generally understood to be unitary and universal. By following these patterns, this essay hopes to cast light on strong and hitherto relatively unexamined dynamics at work within nineteenth-century German secularism, Jewish liberalism, and antisemitism. It also calls into question assumptions found in those theoretical models that have been put forward to describe changes to nineteenth-century church-state relations in Germany and elsewhere.

Secularism and the Confessional State

Historians, literary scholars, and political theorists have recently appropriated the term “secularism” to describe not the belief of the freethinkers who coined it in the 1850s, but rather the modern liberal doctrine and governmental practice of separation of church and state.⁵ Here the problem posed by the Jewish religious

³On the “emancipation contract,” see David Cesarani, “British Jews,” in *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants: Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-century Europe*, ed. Rainer Liedtke and Stephan Wendehorst (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 33–55.

⁴Nadia Valman and Tony Kushner, eds., *Philosemitism, Antisemitism and “the Jews”: Perspectives from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Uffa Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger. Bürgerliche Juden und Protestanten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Irene Diekmann, Elke-Vera Kotowski, and Julius Hans Schoeps, eds., *Geliebter Feind—Gehasster Freund. Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: VBB, 2009); Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe, eds., *Philosemitism in History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵Two texts that have anchored state secularism as a key issue in postcolonial theory are Rajeev Bhargava, ed., *Secularism and its Critics* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University

minority in a Christian nation has been highlighted as the paradigmatic case through which this separation was achieved, but one that also reveals a chief anti-nomy of liberal universalism. As scholars such as Dagmar Herzog and Aamir Mufti have shown, liberal commitment to the full emancipation of Jews was the guarantee of the universality of the state, the nation, humanity, and the public sphere, yet the persistence of Jewish difference posed a challenge to this very universality.⁶ In the resultant tension between assimilation of minority difference and ongoing hostility to it, the modern state and civil society developed the concept of tolerance. Political philosopher Wendy Brown describes tolerance as a discursive practice that extended rights to Jews while it placed them on notice that these rights could be withdrawn if they did not adhere to majoritarian expectations. A tolerated minority is thus one subject to regulation and the threat of intolerance.⁷ In short, the tolerance of religious minorities has been described in this literature as a necessarily contradictory, but ultimately successful means by which the nineteenth-century European states and liberal society extended their hegemony over the nation.

This conclusion sits uneasily with developments in nineteenth-century Prussia and the German Reich, where, at crucial junctures, the state resisted separation from the church and modified rather than abandoned the classification of the population according to religious affiliation. The early nineteenth-century German states had been confessional states, and even after unification in 1870–71, the division of society according to *Konfessionen* remained the “ordering model” for managing religious conflict.⁸ The model, particularly as practiced by Prussia, had two facets. On the one hand, the state understood itself as an impartial adjudicator between those religious communities that enjoyed the status of recognized confessions. On the other hand, it felt duty bound to promote the interests of the Protestant church. These two principles clashed in the 1870s, when the Borussia state initiated a legislative program meant to reduce the power of the Catholic Church in the new nation. Confessional struggles also had a social dimension, as emphasized in recent studies of the

Press, 2003). The term secularism originated with British Freethinker George Holyoake in 1851, who later attempted to maintain the distinction between secularism, which he wanted to restrict to use for adherents of scientific worldview, and secularity, by which he meant state neutrality in religious matters. George Holyoake, *English Secularism: A Confession of Belief* (Chicago: Open Court, 1896), 67.

⁶ Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion*; Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 1–90; Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 48–77.

⁷ Brown wrote, “Political and civic tolerance, then, emerges when a group difference that poses a challenge to the definition or binding features of the whole must be incorporated but also must be sustained as difference: regulated, managed, and controlled. . . . [I]n their association and in the racialization of their identity. . . Jews do pose such a threat; tolerance is the mantle cast over their emancipation to contain it.” Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 71.

⁸ Lucian Hölscher, “Konfessionspolitik in Deutschland zwischen Glaubensstreit und Koexistenz,” in *Baupläne der sichtbaren Kirche. Sprachliche Konzepte religiöser Vergemeinschaftung in Europa*, ed. Lucian Hölscher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 22–25.

Kulturkampf.⁹ And, as Gangolf Hübinger and Helmut Walser Smith have shown, the linkage between the organization of an explicitly Protestant nationalism and the continuation of political anti-Catholicism lasted well into the twentieth century.¹⁰ Although most historians do not view the nineteenth-century as a “second confessional age,” they do increasingly understand confession as a central aspect of modern political organization.¹¹ For, rather than eliminating political Catholicism, the *Kulturkampf* strengthened it. The majority of German Catholics rallied to the Catholic Center Party, thereby leading directly to the lasting pillarization of the German political order.

Historians are now beginning to highlight Jewish positions in these religious-cultural conflicts and thereby to fulfill church historian Kurt Novak’s call for a “triconfessional” history of modern Germany.¹² Nineteenth-century Jewish liberals across western Europe pushed for liturgical, historical, and theological reforms that they believed would make their religion compatible with the established Christian confessions and their community worthy of full emancipation.¹³ Yet, in most German states, precisely the state’s denial of the status of confession to Judaism shaped how Jews were integrated into the confessional system. Historian Christopher Clark has shown how the Lutheran neoorthodox circles close to Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV considered the call for Jewish emancipation in the 1840s a threat to the confessional order and the “Christian State.” The key text here is the 1847 essay “The Christian State and its Relation to Deism and Judaism,” in which the Berlin law professor Friedrich Julius Stahl tried to expose what he saw as a fallacy at the heart of the liberal understanding of

⁹Michael Gross, *The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Manuel Borutta, *Antikatholizismus. Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 2010).

¹⁰Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict. Culture, Ideology, Politics 1870–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik. Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994); Armin Müller-Dreier, *Konfession in Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur des Kaiserreichs. Der Evangelische Bund 1886–1914* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1998). See also Gangolf Hübinger, “Confessionalism,” in *Imperial Germany: A Historical Companion*, ed. Roger Chickering (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1996), 156–184.

¹¹Olaf Blaschke, “Das 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter?,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000): 38–75.

¹²Kurt Novak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland. Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft vom Ende der Aufklärung bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1995), 44–48; Helmut Walser Smith and Chris Clark, “The Fate of Nathan,” in *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 3–29. Alexander Ari Joskowicz, “Anticlerical Alliances: Jews and the Church Question in Germany and France, 1783–1905” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2008).

¹³Jens Neumann-Schlicki, *Konfession oder Stamm? Konzepte jüdischer Identität bei Redakteuren jüdischer Zeitschriften 1840 bis 1881 im internationalen Vergleich* (Bremen: Lüneburg, 2011).

confession.¹⁴ Jews could not be elevated to a third confession as liberals wished, because "[c]onfession consists merely in the different understanding of one and the same revelation, which is jointly believed in; by contrast the difference of religion [consists] in the acceptance of different revelations." God, Stahl continued, may have planned the division of Catholicism and Protestantism as "complements" in order to lead them together later. Jews, who do not accept Christian revelation, stood outside this divine plan, the completion of which it was the state's duty to assist. They could not therefore be recognized as a confession.¹⁵

Clark correctly pointed out the long-term durability of the concept of the "Christian State" in justifying the continued exclusion of Jews from some realms of the Prussian state even after the formal legal emancipation of the Jews by the North German Union in 1869.¹⁶ He largely neglected the significance of the inclusion of "Deists" in the title of Stahl's essay, however. Here Stahl was not thinking of Enlightenment deists, but rather of the rationalist sects of "*Deutschkatholiken*" and "Friends of Light" that had appeared rather suddenly in 1845 and attracted thousands of followers from both Christian confessions (and from Jewish circles as well). Stahl recognized that these were not traditional Protestant dissidents, such as the Mennonites, because the rationalists "dissent from Christianity itself." For Stahl, Jewish emancipation and secularism represented a joint threat. Because the "relationship [of the Jews] to the Christian State is essentially no other than that of declared deist sects," Stahl concluded, "it can give neither the one nor the other political rights," if it "wants to maintain its Christian quality unblemished."¹⁷ It was thus not Jewish emancipation alone that prompted Stahl to articulate his theory of the "Christian State," but rather its appearance together with nascent secularism.¹⁸

By issuing a law on "church-leaving" in 1847 that allowed dissenters legally to exit their confession without entering into a new one, the Prussian king created a space in the confessional landscape for secularist dissidence. But he placed on it a series of economic and social burdens to ensure that the dissidents would not gather many adherents. Henceforth the term "dissident" in German came to

¹⁴Stahl had converted from Judaism to Lutheranism in 1819. Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Der christliche Staat und sein Verhältniß zu Deismus und Judenthum, eine durch die Verhandlungen des vereinigten Landtags hervorgerufene Abhandlung* (Berlin: Ludwig Dehmigke, 1847).

¹⁵Ibid., 60–61.

¹⁶Christopher Clark, "The 'Christian' State and the 'Jewish Citizen' in Nineteenth-Century Prussia," in *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 67–93; 80.

¹⁷Stahl, *Der christliche Staat*, 35, 40.

¹⁸Dagmar Herzog has shown that many Badenese liberals opposed Jewish emancipation until the emergence of *Deutschkatholizismus* in 1845. Only by linking the rights of Jews with the rights of rationalist dissenters did liberals find an attractive way of exposing the contradiction inherent in the state's dual confessional role. Herzog, *Intimacy*.

stand for the adherents of the secularist movements that emerged from the matrix of rationalist dissent, including Free Religion (1859), Freethought (1881), Ethical Culture (1892), and Monism (1906). So great was the association of the terms *Dissident* and *konfessionslos* with secularism and the left, that when the NSDAP took up church-leaving as a political-religious strategy in the mid 1930s, it felt compelled to introduce a new (non)confessional category: *gottgläubig*.¹⁹

By burdening confessionlessness with a host of civil disabilities and by denying rationalist congregations the status of churches, Friedrich Wilhelm IV relegated dissenters to a second-class civic status similar in many ways to that occupied by German Jews. The overlapping of Jew and dissident was revealed in the creation in 1847 of “Registries for Jews and Dissidents” in which police officials registered the state acts (birth, marriage, death) of those who fell outside the acknowledged state churches.²⁰ Despite minor variations in practice between the German states, until 1918 Jews and dissidents were largely barred from high office in military, university, or civil service.²¹ This situation formed the background to the punch line to a humorous anecdote about the Prussian army told by Waldeck Manasse, a Jewish Freethinker and mainstay of the Berlin Free Religious Congregation between the 1880s and the 1920s. When a new recruit announced himself to be a dissident, the aristocratic captain responded, “if you don’t come up with a proper [*anständige*] religion by tomorrow morning, I’ll have to stick you with the Jews!”²²

This essay examines some of the ways in which secularists and Jews were stuck together in late nineteenth-century Germany. It acknowledges the lasting importance of the state’s modification of the confessional system in the 1840s; however, the focus will not be on the state and its actions, but on those groups that struggled with secularism and with the confessional system in the period after the faltering of the *Kulturkampf* in 1878. The essay takes up three vantage points, beginning with the antisemitic camp, where the specter of “godless Jewry” was raised with the dual aim of stopping secularism and reversing Jewish emancipation. The second perspective is that of secularist philosemites, whose defense of the Jews proved highly ambivalent. Although they embraced Jewish emancipation and welcomed Jews into secularist fold, most secularists believed that the “Jewish question” was linked to the problem of confession overall and could only be

¹⁹Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin and New York: DeGruyter, 1998), 281–283.

²⁰Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin VIII. HA, J 1 Juden und Dissidentenregister.

²¹Hannover retained some quasi-confessional structures inherited from the Jewish consistory set up under Napoleonic rule, while some dissident groups were able to maintain legal rights gained during the revolution of 1848, such as the Deutschkatholiken in Saxony. I am grateful to Ari Joskowicz for drawing my attention to the Hannoverian consistory.

²²Waldeck Manasse, *Lebens-Fragen*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Otto Roth, 1910), 6. The left-liberal Jewish MP Ludwig Haas later recounted this story in the Reichstag. Ernest Hamburger, *Juden im öffentlichen Leben Deutschlands* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 216.

solved by Jewish "conversion" to secularism. The third perspective is provided by the liberal Jews who entered secularist organizations in Berlin in the 1880s and 1890s, seeking there not only a means of combating antisemitism but also a mode of attaining national unity that did not require them to relinquish their identity as Jews. For, by and large, liberal Jewish secularists did not wish to cease to be Jews, even as they sought a point of spiritual convergence with other secularists.

My claim here is that modern antisemitism must be understood in the context of the struggle over secularism. At the same time, the confessional dynamics of secularism itself are clearly revealed in the struggle against antisemitism. As this essay will explore, the debates over the "Jewish Question" contributed directly to the differentiation of organized secularism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Progressive Jews constituted the core membership of the Berlin's first Freethought Association Lessing in 1881. While it did not demand conversion as Free Religion apparently did, Freethought, too, confronted Jewish members with a secularist antinomy. Did the expectation that German unity would be achieved through a new post-religious, scientific worldview not contradict their right to community identity? Searching for an alternative, some liberal Jewish Freethinkers wrote ethics on their banner and entered into a struggle with the advocates of naturalistic monism. Five years after police repression closed Lessing in 1887, a new association took up the banner: the German Society for Ethical Culture. Yet here, too, the antinomies of supraconfessional politics became apparent.

All parties to the debate over confession and secularism sought to hold Jews accountable to their version of the "emancipation contract." The German confessional context, however, calls into question the assumption found in much recent literature on the "Jewish Question" and on political secularism, that the emancipation contract coincided with the growing hegemony of liberalism or of the modern state. In fact, quite the opposite was the case. The hegemonic aspirations of each anticonfessional model, whether to be achieved through an ecumenical "Christian state," the secularization of the state, or the triumph of worldview secularism, only deepened confessional antagonisms in Germany. In the process, they revealed a divided confessional field defined by struggles among secularists, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants.²³ This quadricconfessional arrangement marked Germany as distinct from the essentially mono-confessional Catholic countries, such as France, Italy, and Spain, where secularism was ensconced in the political culture of the republican left, as well as from England, where a more pluralistic religious field developed under the domination

²³The notion of a quadricconfessional field is elaborated in my forthcoming monograph *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

of the established church.²⁴ The trope of godless Jewry was propagated in all countries where Jewish emancipation coincided with the rise of secularism and processes of secularization, but its confessional articulation varied greatly.

Antisemitism and Antisecularism in the “Berlin Antisemitism Controversy”

Historians commonly cite the eruption in 1879 of the “Berlin Antisemitism Controversy” as the event during which antisemitism was first fully articulated and popularized in its modern form. In September of that year, Protestant Court Chaplain Adolf Stoecker elevated Jews to the chief target of his Christian Social movement. A greater shock to Berlin’s liberal public sphere came two months later when the prominent Berlin historian Heinrich von Treitschke declared Germany’s Jews its national “misfortune.” This intervention by one of Germany’s leading intellectual voices is widely credited with having taken antisemitism from the streets (and the pulpits) and having made it socially acceptable. Within the next two years, antisemitism became a rallying point for a nationalist right that had become disaffected with liberalism. The petition drive of Berlin students that called for a reversal of Jewish emancipation found thousands of signatories at other universities and prompted a debate on the floor of the Prussian Diet in November 1880.²⁵ On the day following a large anti-semitic rally in Berlin in late December, organized crowds descended on the central Friedrichstadt neighborhood, where amid shouts of “Juden raus!” they broke windows and provoked fistfights with those they took for Jews. The Jewish socialist Eduard Bernstein considered the year following the riot “one of the most eventful in Berlin’s political history. It was the year when for a time it appeared that the antisemitic agitation would dominate the entire public sphere.”²⁶

The standard interpretation of these events was provided more than thirty years ago by historian Shulamit Volkov, who argued that antisemitism served as an organizing principle of illiberalism. It bundled together a number of “false metaphors” to make antisemitism a conservative cultural code. Her central thesis was that the shift from religious arguments to racial-biological metaphors served in the

²⁴Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche, eds., *Nation und Religion in Europa. Mehrkonfessionelle Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2004); Jaskowicz, “Anticlerical Alliances”; David Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-semitism* (New York: A. Knopf, 2001); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Edward Royle, “The Faces of Janus: Free-thinkers, Jews and Christianity in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 409–418.

²⁵Jensen, *Gebildete Doppeltgänger*, 288–291.

²⁶Eduard Bernstein, *Die Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiter-Bewegung* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1907), 59.

transition from traditional anti-Judaism, which focused on individuals and religion, to modern antisemitism, which conceived of Jewry (*Judentum*) as an abstract idea. Here Volkov quoted the statement by Wilhelm Marr, the man credited with coining the term antisemitism in 1878, that his antisemitism was made from "a non-confessional point of view."²⁷

Historians have subsequently called into question Volkov's neat sequential division of modern racial antisemitism from traditional religious anti-Judaism. Some have stressed the importance of the long-term continuities of Christian anti-Judaism, while others have focused on the importance of the notion of the Christian nation to the formation of reactionary integral nationalism.²⁸ Wolfgang Altgeld has drawn attention to the structural similarity of the antisemitism of the late 1870s to the anti-Catholicism at the outset of the decade. Like the "black international" of ultramontane Catholicism, the "yellow international" was portrayed as an antinational, divisive conspiracy to weaken the nation.²⁹ Depictions of "Talmudic Jewry" as a fossilized, superficial, and retrograde religion paralleled similar tropes that Protestant liberals mobilized against Catholicism. While it is true, however, that there was a religious logic to the new antisemitism, this was not a mere continuity of religious anti-Judaism. The crucial difference between antisemitism and anti-Catholicism was that antisemites identified *Judentum* less as a religious competitor than as religion's very undoing. A survey of texts by key protagonists in the Berlin Antisemitism Controversy will reveal that the conflation of modern Jewry with worldview secularism was a unifying feature across the political and religious spectrum of the emerging antisemitic discourse. Christian conservatives could and did agree with the atheist Marr that they were operating from "a non-confessional point of view" because they were all accusing Jews of being the secret agents of antireligion in Germany.

The antisemitic wave followed opposition to the secularizing measures of the Kulturkampf. In its early phase, the Catholic press depicted the Kulturkampf as a

²⁷Shulamit Volkov, "Antisemitism as Cultural Code—Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Germany," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* XXIII (1978): 25–45.

²⁸On long-term continuities of Christian anti-Judaism, see Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Christhard Hoffmann provides a survey of investigations of the religious dimension of modern antisemitism, but none treats religion through the lens of confession. Christhard Hoffmann, "Christlicher Antijudaismus und moderner Antisemitismus. Zusammenhänge und Differenzen der historischen Antisemitismusforschung," in *Christlicher Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus. Theologische und kirchliche Programme Deutscher Christen*, ed. Leonore Siegele-Wenschkevitz (Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1994). On the importance of the Christian nation to the formation of reactionary integral nationalism, see Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁹Wolfgang Altgeld, "Religion, Denomination and Nationalism in Nineteenth-century Germany," in *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 49–65, 59.

Jewish ploy to deepen the confessional division of Germany with the ultimate aim of destroying Christianity.³⁰ In 1874, the conservative *Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* claimed that the hidden “titan” in the Reichstag was “the religion of material interests,” or “in short, Judaism.”³¹

Similar tropes circulated with greater frequency in the conservative Protestant press, as the Protestant Church began to feel the effects of the secularizing legislation put forward by Bismarck’s Minister of Education, Adalbert Falk. Following the introduction of civil marriage and proposals for nondenominational schools, many Protestants came to see their church as the greatest victim of the Kulturkampf. As in Catholic circles, some of the most vocal Protestant antisemites, such as Adolf Stoecker, were also frontline leaders in the battle against secularism and the Kulturkampf.³² Stoecker had experienced the Franco-Prussian war as a sacred intervention, in which God handed the German people a weapon to purify itself of “French godlessness” and “the dogma of its animality.” Soon after arriving in Berlin to become a court preacher in 1874, he began to preach against the “dance around the golden calf,” party division and de-Christianization he witnessed in the capital.³³ It was at this time that he first developed the notion of an inner bond between secularism and Judaism. In a speech given in March 1875, Stoecker claimed that the anticlericalism and materialism that threatened German culture were products of the disintegration of the Jewish religion. It was, he declared, “a judgment of God that a nation that God chose to be the guardian of religion is attempting to cheat Christians of their religion. Do not let yourselves be fooled by the remains of religion” that Jews manifested in their maintenance of the Sabbath, “[t]he division of belief and unbelief is also splitting the ranks of Israel.” But, whereas Christianity was still withstanding the onslaught, Stoecker believed that Judaism had already succumbed to unbelief: “[w]ith that

³⁰Olaf Blaschke noted that antisemitism proved useful to Catholics “in order to compensate the compressed experience of secularization” in the Kulturkampf. Olaf Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997), 56. Yuri Slezkine argued that secularism became identified with Jews, in part, because of Jewish prominence in its support: Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 63.

³¹“Die Reichstags-Titanen,” *Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 47 (1874): 948–59, 955. In 1881 the journal referred to confessional division as the “fissure in the rock of the German nation” into which “the upward-reaching tree of Jewish power has sunk its roots, and it has succeeded in penetrating to the ground.” “Wie das alte Jahr dem neuen die Judenfrage vermacht,” *Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 87 (1881): 15–16.

³²The Catholic priest, Father Eduard Müller, faced off against Berlin secularists in the 1869 controversy of the foundation of a “monastery” in Moabit. He also used his *Berliner St. Bonifaciuskalender* to publicize antisemitic views. On Müller, see Margaret L. Anderson, “The Kulturkampf and the Course of German History,” *Central European History* 19 (1986): 82–115, and Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus*, 252.

³³From Stoecker’s articles of 1870 and 1876 in the *Neue Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, as cited in Hans Engelmann, *Kirche am Abgrund. Adolf Stoecker und seine antijüdische Bewegung* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1984), 25, 75.

the prophets are dead, the Old Testament dead: Blood has come and in its torrents has engulfed the faith of Israel. The blood of judgment has come; the Jews no longer have a hope." Their only salvation was the "blood of Jesus."³⁴

Stoecker's argument about the vulnerability of Jews to secularism relied on the old Protestant tradition of viewing Judaism since Jesus as a degenerated and desiccated form of ancient Hebrewism, as well as on the eschatological belief that the mission to the Jews was required for universal salvation.³⁵ Stoecker, however, now raised Jews from a negative foil of Protestantism to its chief threat. He repeatedly returned to the accusation that liberal, secular Jews had become "godless," calling "Jewry" an "irreligious power" in the Reichstag.³⁶ In April 1885, he gave a well-attended speech on "Semite, Atheist, and Social Democrat," in which he restated his appreciation for "Old Testament Judaism," as against the "modern" Judaism. "Semite and atheist," he claimed, had "recently gained in affinity" and "such a Jewry, which wants atheism, must be fought by us to the death [*auf Tod und Leben*]."³⁷ This construction had a lasting impact on how Protestant clergy and institutions reacted to secularism and to Judaism. For example, two years after joining the NSDAP in 1932, the influential theologian Immanuel Hirsch updated Stoecker's thought for the "Third Reich": "When later the human history of the nineteenth century is remembered, one will understand Marxism as the product of a German-Jewish mixed marriage and as an example of the inner impossibility of Jewish emancipation on the soil of a Christian *Volk*. Perhaps bolshevism will even be designated an unbelieving aberration of the Jewish religion."³⁸

The confessional identification of Judentum with atheism also had a privileged place in the antisemitic bundle of the supposedly "nonreligious" early *völkisch*

³⁴Cited in Dietrich von Oertzen, *Adolf Stoecker. Lebensbild und Zeitgeschichte* (Berlin: Verlag der Vaterländischen Verlags- und Kunstanstalt, 1910), 130–31. On the importance of secularism to Stoecker's antisemitism, see Engelmann, *Kirche am Abgrund*, and Martin Greschat, "Protestantischer Antisemitismus in Wilhelminischer Zeit—Das Beispiel des Hofpredigers Adolf Stoecker," in *Antisemitismus*, ed. Wilhelm Brakelmann and Martin Rosowski (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 27–51.

³⁵Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Antisemitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

³⁶In 1880, Stoecker called "modern Judaism [. . .] an extinct form of religion, [. . .] that has lost its divine course," and that chased the "idol of gold." Cited in Günther Ginzel, "Vom religiösen zum rassistischen Judenhaß," in *Antisemitismus. Erscheinungsform der Judenfeindschaft gestern und heute*, ed. Günther Ginzel (Bielefeld: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1991), 154. In a private letter to Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1880, Stoecker insisted that he was "not attacking the Jews, but rather the irreverent, godless, usurious, deceitful Jewry [Judentum], which is, in fact, the misfortune of our people." Cited in Oertzen, *Stoecker*, 219.

³⁷Police report of April 28, 1885, Landesarchiv Berlin (hereafter LAB) A. Pr. Br. 030, tit. 95, no. 15072, 26.

³⁸Immanuel Hirsch, *Die gegenwärtige geistige Lage im Spiegel philosophischer und theologischer Besinnung*, 24. I am grateful to Robert Erikson for this translation.

nationalists.³⁹ This paradox was given expression in the first point of the 1881 program of the antisemitic *Deutsche Volksverein*, which declared itself to be not a “religious but social-political” association, only to affirm in the next sentence the Christian basis of the German Volk.⁴⁰ Through the negative referent of the degenerated “Jewish spirit,” völkisch groups activated their idealized notions of a national-religious German spirit. Similarly, the notorious antisemite Otto Glagau announced in his Berlin journal *Der Kulturkämpfer* in 1880 “a struggle against atheism and materialism [. . .] for the loftiest and holiest good of the nation.”⁴¹ Materialism formed the central metaphor of the antisemitic cultural code because it fused natural-scientific atheism, laissez-faire economics, and socialism in a single term.

The linkage of Jews to atheism and anticlericalism also performed a crucial function in Treitschke’s “Unsere Aussichten” of 1879, which appeared amid the looming breakup of the National Liberal Party over Bismarck’s willingness to reverse liberal economic policies and freeze the Kulturkampf. Treitschke’s article is often cited as the key text that marked the shift from “left to right” nationalism (i.e., from one based on liberal-humanitarian principles to one rooted in authoritarian chauvinism).⁴² In it, he claimed that the recent assassination attempts against the *Kaiser* had forced Germans like himself to “rethink the value of our humanity and enlightenment.” Against the “feeble philanthropy of our age,” Treitschke applauded the “reawakened conscience of the people,” which sought a restoration of strict order through obedience to law and monarchy. In the tradition of liberal cultural nationalism, Treitschke still adhered to the notion that the German nation reflected a spiritual unity. But instead of embodying the rational political ideals of liberalism, he claimed that this national foundation was grounded in the religious realm and under threat from secularism.

³⁹The trope of “godless Jewry” is also found among those antisemites who identified as “freethinkers,” such as Wilhelm Marr. “The Jew,” he wrote, had, “no ideal religion, [. . .] just a business contract with Jehovah.” Another leading völkisch thinker who briefly captured the imagination of many German socialists was Eugen Dühring, who wanted to form an “anti-religion” that would replace Christianity and take up battle with Jewish spirit. This “anti-religion” was decidedly not that of Free Religion, which he accused of being a tool of Jewish interests. Johannes Heil, “Antisemitismus, Kulturkampf und Konfession—Die antisemitischen ‘Kulturen’ Frankreichs und Deutschlands im Vergleich,” in *Katholischer Antisemitismus im 19. Jahrhundert. Ursachen und Traditionen im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Olaf Blaschke and Aram Mattioli (Zurich: Orell Füssli, 2000), 210, 215, 217. Eugen Dühring, *Die Judenfrage als Racen-, Sitten- und Culturfrage* (Karlsruhe and Leipzig: H. Reuther, 1881), 147–48.

⁴⁰LAB A. Pr. Br. 030, tit. 95, no. 15097, 3–5.

⁴¹Published in 1880 in *Der Kulturkämpfer*, a journal Glagau founded and edited between 1880 and 1888. Cited in Georg Jäger, “Die Gründerzeit,” in *Realismus und Gründerzeit. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848–1880*, ed. Max Bucher et al. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche, 1976), 317, 113.

⁴²Shulamith Volkov, “Antisemitism as Cultural Code”; Heinrich August Winkler, “Vom linken zum rechten Nationalismus. Der deutsche Liberalismus in der Krise von 1878/79,” in *Liberalismus und Antiliberalismus. Studien zur politischen Sozialgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 232–245.

505 "While broad segments of our people have fallen victim to arid disbelief"
 506 (a development Treitschke blamed on Jewish journalists), he celebrated the
 507 recent and "unmistakable resurgence of church feeling."⁴³

508 In a further article of January 1880 Treitschke opposed the notion put forward
 509 by a leading Berlin liberal Moritz Lazarus that "today every nationality is com-
 510 posed of several religions," making Judaism "German in the same sense as
 511 Christianity." Treitschke believed that only Christianity was "tightly interwoven
 512 [. . .] with all fibers of the German people," so that if "half of our people deserted
 513 Christianity, [there is] no doubt, the German nation must fall. Everything we call
 514 German would end in rubble. Lazarus does not consider the difference of religion
 515 and confession; he imagines the categories Catholic, Protestant, Jewish as coordi-
 516 nated." From Treitschke's perspective, confessional division was only tolerable
 517 among Christians, for whom he held out the supraconfessional hope that it
 518 would someday come to a "purer form of Christianity, [. . .] that would
 519 reunite the divided brothers." He concluded with the warning that the "Jewish
 520 question" would not subside "until our Israelite citizens learn through our
 521 stance that we are and want to remain a Christian people."⁴⁴

522 Treitschke's attempt to pin the rise of materialism and anticlericalism on Jews
 523 earned him particularly sharp rebukes from Jewish opponents. The Breslau rabbi
 524 and philosopher Manuel Joël wrote that he shared Treitschke's abhorrence at the
 525 spread of "unbelief" but denied that its source was either the Jews or Immanuel
 526 Kant, the philosopher of "humanity" idolized by Jewish liberals and ridiculed by
 527 Treitschke. Rather, Joël argued, atheism stemmed from the followers of the ideal-
 528 ist Hegel and from the materialists, ranging from Jacob Moleschott to Ernst
 529 Haeckel, all of who were Christians like Treitschke. "Why then," demanded
 530 Joël, "do you accept the argument against the Jews of atheism?"⁴⁵

531 It was Treitschke's confessional argumentation that most vexed Hermann
 532 Cohen, a founding figure of Neo-Kantian philosophy. If Treitschke had restricted
 533 himself to an argument about biological differences or "Racen-Instincte," Cohen
 534 would have dismissed his attack as merely insulting and tasteless. But by basing his
 535 arguments on religious and confessional difference, Treitschke had made "confes-
 536 sing [*Bekennen*] [. . .] a religious obligation, also in a national sense." Cohen's
 537 *Bekanntnis* was to a Judaism that shared with liberal Protestantism the "cultural his-
 538 torical mission of humanizing religion." Cohen agreed with Treitschke that reli-
 539 gion was the foundation of the German nation. Contrary to Treitschke's claims,
 540 however, Cohen believed that liberal Judaism had already achieved a "religious
 541

542 ⁴³Heinrich von Treitschke, "Unsere Aussichten," in *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*, ed. Walter
 543 Boehlich (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1965).

544 ⁴⁴Heinrich von Treitschke, "Noch einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage," in *Der Berliner*
 545 *Antisemitismusstreit*, 88.

546 ⁴⁵Manuel Joël, "Offener Brief an Herrn Heinrich von Treitschke," in *Der Berliner*
Antisemitismusstreit, 18–19.

community” with Protestantism and shared with it the same “enemies” in those naturalists who “attack the idea of the single God.”⁴⁶

Cohen’s commentary is instructive because it points to the fact that the racial thinking present in all early antisemitic texts did not supercede the religious understanding of Jewish difference, as has been frequently argued, but rather it helped recast it. Racial thinking made Jews suitable for a new religious role, which was to embody materialism and national degeneration. Christian nationalists first popularized Marr’s term through the formation of the *Antisemitenliga* in 1879, at roughly the same time that Stoecker lauded Marr as a defender of the “Christian state.”⁴⁷ As a writer for a Protestant newspaper found in 1880, once the ancient Jews were abandoned by the spirit of God, all that was left of them was their Semitic race. “The Semitic spirit,” he concluded, “is as different from the spirit of God as night from day.” They oppose one another as “nature and grace” do.⁴⁸ Identified as a manifestation of “Jewish spirit,” secularism could be both robbed of its supposed universality and more readily comprehended as an enemy within the confessional system. Thus, although antisemitism may have flowed through “an old, nearly dried up river bed,” as the philosemitic Democratic politician Ludwig Quidde observed in 1881, its religious motivation was not traditional *Judenhass*, but “reaction against religious liberalism and radicalism, against modern faithlessness, against skepticism and materialism.”⁴⁹

Philosemitism and Secularism

Joël and Cohen tried to expose Treitschke’s accusations as falsehoods by arguing that liberal Judaism was the most reliable partner for Protestant nationalism in a joint struggle against the godless and the orthodox alike. By contrast, organized secularists largely affirmed the linkage of their movement to the Jewish struggle for emancipation. Free Religious preachers were among the earliest non-Jews to denounce the antisemitic agitation of Treitschke and Stoecker.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁶Hermann Cohen, “Ein Bekenntniss in der Judenfrage,” in *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*, 127. The Jewish-Protestant “synthesis” and connections of ethics, philosophy, religion and national unity continued to inform Cohen’s work up until the very end of his life. Hans Bach, *The German Jew: A Synthesis of Judaism and Western Civilization, 1730–1930* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 194–201.

⁴⁷Moshe Zimmermann, “Aufkommen und Diskreditierung des Begriffs Antisemitismus”, in *Das Unrechtsregime. Internationale Forschung über den Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Ursula Büttner (Hamburg: Christians, 1986), 59–77; Engelmann, *Kirche am Abgrund*, 78.

⁴⁸The 1880 article “Zur Judenfrage,” *AELKZ*, as cited in Wolfgang Heinrichs, *Das Judenbild im Protestantismus des Deutschen Kaiserreichs. Ein Beitrag zur Mentalitätsgeschichte des deutschen Bürgertums in der Krise der Moderne* (Cologne: Rheinland-Verl., 2000), 59.

⁴⁹Anonymous (Ludwig Quidde), *Die Antisemitenagitation und die deutsche Studentenschaft* (Göttingen: Peppmüller, 1881), 3, 6.

⁵⁰Uffa Jensen has shown that non-Jews generally did not respond in print to Treitschke’s accusations until the autumn of 1880. Free Religionists proved to be an exception to this rule. Jensen, *Doppelgänger*, 269–316. Some of the brochures published by Free Religious preachers during the

manner in which they defended Jews against antisemitic attack reveals how central the "Jewish question" was to the internal construction of secularism. An excellent case study is provided by the agitation initiated by the longtime preacher of the Berlin Free Religious Congregation, Georg Siegfried Schaefer, after Jewish members of the Congregation urged him to respond to Court Chaplain Stoecker's assaults in November 1879.⁵¹ Rather than merely defend the rights of Jews, Schaefer used his lectern as a platform to develop a public position that placed the "Jewish question" at the center of his critique of the confessional system and linked it to the fate of Free Religion.

Typical of most non-Jewish (and many Jewish) opponents of antisemitism, Schaefer acknowledged the reasonableness of many of the antisemitic claims. Police protocols of his speeches state that he held the Jews partially to blame for the fact that antisemitic slander fell on fertile ground. Here he named pride, the collection of wealth and parvenu ostentation as "excesses" produced by centuries of ghettoization and discrimination. Yet these "excesses" were not the real motor driving antisemitism, Schaefer claimed in a speech in November 1880. Rather, antisemitism was a defensive reaction by the confessional system itself. This system had developed without a place in it for Jews, whom Schaefer called the "recognized dissidents" because of their long history as Germany's most publicly recognized excluded minority. By struggling for the same rights as Christians, Jews exposed the false unity that had existed between the subject of the state and the subject of the state church. This shook the foundations of the confessional state and the divine right of Prussian monarchy. Antisemitism was for Schaefer an elite strategy to rescue the confessional system and its privileges: "the movement does not originate from below, but from above [. . .] from pulpit, lectern and judge's [bench]

Antisemitism controversy include Johannes Ronge, *Offenes Sendschreiben*, January 16, 1881; Theodor Hofferichter, *Für die Semiten. Vortrag gehalten am 28. November 1880 vor der freireligiösen Gemeinde zu Breslau*, Breslau, 1880; Andreas Reichenbach, *Die moderne Judenhetze. Nach einem öffentlichen Vortrage*, Breslau, 1879, and Andreas Reichenbach, *Nach der Hatz. Kritische Betrachtung der letzten Judenhetze in Deutschland als der neuesten Krankheitserscheinung des deutschen Volkes*, Zurich, 1881; Karl Scholl, *Das Judentum und die Religion der Humanität. Vortrag zum 33. Stiftungsfest der freireligiösen Gemeinde in Mannheim am 17. August 1879*, Leipzig, 1879, Karl Scholl, *Das Judentum und seine Weltmission*, Leipzig, 1880 and Karl Scholl, *Jesus von Nazareth, auch ein Semite*, 3rd ed., Leipzig, 1881. Leading philosemites, such as the pacifist Bertha von Suttner, ethicist Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, and Democrat Ludwig Quidde, had a lifelong affinity to organized secularism. Alan Levenson, *Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism: Defenses of Jews and Judaism in Germany, 1871–1932* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 21–43.

⁵¹The police report stated that the Free Religious Congregation's Jewish leaders feared that Albert Kalthoff, a radical Protestant minister and leader of the Protestant Reform Association, might upstage the Free Religious and become the champion of Berlin's liberal Jews. LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15042, unpaginated, police report of Nov. 30, 1879. Kalthoff's biography was to take a decidedly secularist turn and in 1906, shortly before his death, he became the chairman of the German Monist League.

[. . .] [b]ecause the old privileges of public and social life [. . .] depend on the old faith.”⁵²

Schaefer told his listeners that behind the Jews were the Free Religionists, who occupied a similar structural position outside the confessional order. Although less visible, these “nonrecognized dissidents” were ultimately more radical and dangerous because they possessed a fitting anticonfessional worldview. The most radical dissident for Schaefer was, however, the secularist Jew, the ultimate nemesis of the Christian Socials.

One often hears, “I prefer a Jew of the old faith to a Free Religious Christian.” The secularist [*freigeistig*] Jew, however, destroys the old belief in divine right, the belief [that] you are dependent on God’s mercy, you have to submit to it. Instead, the man of reason says Man himself is God. From these principles is born the reform of as a whole life. Thus the religious is the most radical reform.⁵³

Schaefer’s logic thus far echoes that of Stahl and Treitschke. The historical record provides ample evidence to support their claim that Jews and dissidents made natural allies in a joint struggle against the confessional order. In cities such as Königsberg, Berlin, and Breslau, Jews and Free Religious cooperated in a number of liberal projects, including the formation of confessionless schools.⁵⁴ For Schaefer, however, such cooperation was not the end point of the relationship between Jewish and Free Religious dissent. Schaefer expected the “nonrecognized dissidents” to supersede the Jews because, in his eyes, the ultimate target of antisemitism was dissidence itself. By stepping into the clerical cross fire, Free Religion had “assumed the martyrdom, which had previously burdened [the Jews].”⁵⁵ Furthermore, Schaefer suggested that Jews were being justly punished for not fully embracing secularism. Remaining separate was for Schaefer the real sin of Jewish emancipation. Schaefer told his listeners that the decision of the Reform Jewish Congregations to remain loyal to the “historical mission” of promoting monotheism rather than joining the Union of Free Religious Congregations in 1859 was now “wreaking its vengeance on them.” Schaefer

⁵²Police report of November 28, 1880, LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15043, 286.

⁵³LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15043, 286.

⁵⁴In 1847 Julius Rupp’s dissident congregation in Königsberg met in the local synagogue. In Breslau cooperation between left-liberal Jews and Free Religious (represented by the preacher Theodor Hofferichter) took place in the large popular scientific Humboldt-Verein and in the successful efforts to found the Johanneum, a nondenominational *Gymnasium*. Joskowicz, “Anticlerical Alliances,” 212–218; Till van Rahden, *Jews and other Germans: Civil Society, Religious Diversity, and Urban Politics in Breslau, 1860–1925*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 322.

⁵⁵LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15043, 286, police report of Nov. 28, 1880; no. 15042, unpaginated, police report of Oct. 12, 1879.

warned "as long as the Jews do not reach out their hands to liberated humanity, they will be castigated."⁵⁶

Just as the young Karl Marx had argued that the "Jewish Question" could only be solved by the elimination of the capitalist system that produced Jewish difference along with the division of labor, Schaefer argued that that only the destruction of the confessional system would eliminate antisemitism and "then the Jew is also liberated from Jewishness."⁵⁷ Consequently, at a discussion evening on November 16, 1880, Schaefer proposed that the Free Religious Congregation respond to antisemitism by taking out ads in all major Berlin newspapers with the following declaration: "Away with the dissident and Jewish question from the people. Away with all religious privileges from the state. Away with confessional instruction in the schools." Dr. Eduard Abarbanell, a prominent Jewish member, objected sharply to this self-interested identification of the Free Religious Congregation with the plight of the Jews: "it is not the time now to step forward publicly and say, 'we are also not Christians, but demand equal rights.' Such a declaration would just fan the flames."⁵⁸ Despite this criticism, Schaefer continued to press his view that the proper response to antisemitism was to strengthen Free Religious anticonfessionalism and pressure freethinking Jews to abandon their confessional autonomy. "The maintenance of the special Jewish confessionality and mission" was, according to theses Schaefer's congregation submitted to the national congress of the Union of Free Religious Congregations in July 1881, a "main obstacle" to the formation of "interconfessional humanistic congregations."⁵⁹

Schaefer's comments demonstrate that radical secularism, too, displayed the same philosemitic logic of assimilation and exclusion that scholars have identified in a host of nineteenth-century movements ranging from Christian evangelicalism to liberalism. Within the framework of a single nation and a single God, to seek unity between Jews and non-Jews was ultimately to seek the exclusion of Jews as Jews from this unity. Christopher Clark's pithy definition, "a philosemite is an antisemite who loves Jews," may be overstated, but Clark is correct in arguing that "[a]xiomatic to both was the assumption that the collective destiny of the Jews and that of the Christians were inseparably bound up."⁶⁰ Schaefer shared with Treitschke and Stoecker the fantasy that the destruction or

⁵⁶Schaefer had already expressed his hope that Jewish congregations would join the Union of Free Religious Congregations in 1870. G. S. Schaefer, *Die Grundsätze der freireligiösen Gemeinde. Als Entwurf der allgemeinen öffentlichen Kritik, insbesondere der freireligiösen Gemeinde zu Berlin übergeben* (Berlin: Self-published, 1870), 9.

⁵⁷LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15043, 286, police report of Nov. 28, 1880.

⁵⁸LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15043, 279, police report of Nov. 16, 1880.

⁵⁹*Die Morgenröte der Reformation des 19. Jahrhunderts. Sonntagsblatt für Freunde der religiösen Reform*, Offenbach, vol. 4, nos. 25 and 26 (July 19, 1881).

⁶⁰Christopher Clark, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia 1728–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 281.

punishment of Jews would be a means toward the salvation of the nation and a solution to the competition between confession and secularism.

As Dagmar Herzog has shown in her study of the liberal and dissident philo-Semitism of the 1840s, the encounter between Jews and non-Jews was central to the constitution of liberal humanism.⁶¹ By dissolving the boundaries between Jew and non-Jew on an imaginary or practical-political level, the universal drama of humanism was performed. Schaefer himself provides a good example of this drama in the preface he wrote to an anonymous pamphlet published in 1885 as *Thoughts of the Nineteenth Century on the Inevitable Solution of the Social, Political and Religious Question by a Jew according to his Birth and Orthodox Education*.⁶² Schaefer invited the reader to approach the pamphlet's text as a mirror that would reflect his own experience of the spirit of the age. Most importantly, the reader might recognize himself reflected in the man behind the text, the author, "because you only comprehend the spirit that you equal [*gleichst*] or at least resemble [*ähnelst*]." It is crucial that the author is a Jew. Only through this sharing of the spirit of humanism across the gulf separating Jew from non-Jew can post-Christian humanism become universal and unifying. "I for my part," Schaefer concluded, "have found myself reflected in the present work [. . .] with a few minor exceptions. This is a joy of spiritual recognition, which Lessing expressed with the words: 'O that I could find one more for whom it suffices to be a human [*Mensch*]'!"⁶³

This motif is also found in the writings of Jewish secularists, for example, in this line from Ferdinand Falkson, a key figure in events leading up the 1848 revolution: "And from the Jew, from the Christian / Rises up the human [*Mensch*] with joy."⁶⁴ Yet, despite such shared yearning for spiritual unity, Falkson and Schaefer disagreed on its form. Falkson refused to join Free Religion despite his principal agreement with it, while Schaefer demanded that Jew and non-Jew, each having cast off their orthodox upbringing and recognized each other as brothers, must unite in "free humanist congregations."⁶⁵ Jewish difference is crucial to producing the universality of secularist humanism, but the continued existence of Jews as separate from non-Jewish secularists is, in the eyes of philoSemites, an act of betrayal; hence the love of Jews and the hostility toward Jewishness that mark philo-Semitism. Thus one finds in a single speech Schaefer's exaltation of the "freigeistig Jew" (here he may have had his mentor Johann Jacoby in mind)

⁶¹Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy*.

⁶²Anonymous, *Gedanken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts zur unausbleichlichen Lösung der sozialen, politischen und religiösen Frage von einem Juden, seiner Geburt und orthodoxen Erziehung nach mit einem Vorwort von G. S. Schäfer, Lehrer der fr. Gemeinde* (Berlin: Rubenow, 1885).

⁶³*Ibid.*, I, II.

⁶⁴Cited in Jacob Toury, *Die politischen Orientierungen der Juden in Deutschland. Von Jena bis Weimar* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1966), 73.

⁶⁵Anonymous, *Gedanken*, II.

followed by a resounding condemnation of Reform Judaism, with the intimation that antisemitic persecution was a divine punishment for Jewish resistance to the loving embrace of Free Religion.⁶⁶

Schaefer's views were not idiosyncratic. Philosemitic ambivalence was anchored in the constitution of the Union of Free Religious Congregations. At the founding congress in 1859, the prominent former Protestant preacher Leberecht Uhlich proposed that entrance to the Union "also be held open to Jewish Reform Congregations." Eduard Baltzer, another former minister, opposed the measure with the remark that, because the Union was open to anyone that supported its constitution, no special invitation to Jewish congregations was needed.⁶⁷ Uhlich's proposal was voted down. While seemingly impartial, this decision expressed a rejection of Free Religious Congregations that wanted to remain Jewish-identified. Jews were welcomed within Free Religion but as individuals rather than as members of a community. In effect, entrance into Free Religion implied a conversion from Judaism.

Despite the exclusionary logic of philosemitism, until the late 1870s liberal and radical Jews had generally been able to identify with the universalist vision captured in the often invoked dream of a "religion of humanity." For as long as liberals were optimistic, the imagined spiritual unification of Germany remained an open-ended process that encompassed various interpretations of just what was meant by "religion of humanity," be it national Protestantism, a fusion of cultural Protestantism and cultural Judaism, or materialist *Weltanschauung*. This changed with the spreading pessimism of the late Kulturkampf, when many segments of the population were gripped by the feeling that Germany had fallen victim to the forces of national disintegration. Whipped on by antisemitic agitation, philosemites demanded that the process of Jewish assimilation be foreshortened and pressured Jewish liberals to sacrifice their difference to shore up national unity.⁶⁸

This shift manifested itself starkly in historian Theodor Mommsen's reply to the antisemitism of his colleague Treitschke. In an essay published in autumn 1880 by this stalwart of the Berlin Progressive Party, Mommsen affirmed the

⁶⁶In her analysis of the central role that fraternal and romantic love between Jews and non-Jews played in the philosemitic imaginary of religious dissenters of the 1840s, Dagmar Herzog showed that this merging took place within the liberal logic of assimilation, in which the specifically Jewish identity was to be eliminated. Herzog, *Intimacy*, 54–84.

⁶⁷Tschirn, *Zur 60jährigen Geschichte der freireligiösen Bewegung* (Gottesberg: Hensels, 1904), 94.

⁶⁸Using the example of German freemasonry, Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann has offered a functional explanation of switch from inclusionary to exclusionary treatment of Jews in liberal society of the late 1870s and 1880s. He argues that bourgeois philosemitism fell victim to the success of bourgeois universalism: "the more purportedly universal human values of bourgeois culture were actually disseminated in the course of the nineteenth century—and the Jews, for example, became 'bourgeois'—the more the moral language of universality was redefined by the Protestant bourgeoisie in order to render it capable of distinction again." Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Brothers or Strangers? Jews and Freemasons in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *German History* 18, no. 2 (2000): 146.

beneficial qualities of Germany's racial pluralism and defended the Jewish right to freedom of conscience, but he concluded with a plea for Jews to convert to Christianity as the ultimate solution to the "Jewish question." "The entry into a great nation has its price," Mommsen admonished. As long as it did not contradict the dictates of their conscience, Mommsen believed that German Jews should abandon their religious affiliation, thereby fulfilling their obligation "to eliminate their particularity and cast down all barriers that stand between them and the other German citizens."⁶⁹ Thus, rather than the self-guided process of assimilation many German Jews accepted, philosemites such as Mommsen and Schaefer confronted liberal Jews with the demand for an immediate assimilation through religious conversion.

Jewish Responses to Secularist Philosemitism

The third level of my analysis concerns the Jewish secularist response to the philosemitic offer to convert. Secularism presented liberal German Jews with a conundrum. How could they join a national community based upon a shared secular-spiritual foundation without abandoning their own Jewish identity and community? Some clearly found an acceptable model of unity in Free Religion, and records reveal a small but steady stream of "converts"—a term that we must use guardedly because until the 1870s many if not most new Free Religionists, Jews and non-Jews alike, did not actually withdraw from their old confessions when they become members. Jews made up roughly three to five percent of all new members of Berlin's Free Religious Congregation in the years 1861–78.⁷⁰ Prominent Jews joined Free Religion in the name of Judaism; among them was Hermann Jacobson, the son of Israel Jacobson, one of the most radical Jewish reformers of the Napoleonic era. He announced his "conversion" to Free Religion in 1852 based on his "conviction [. . .] that Christianity, as understood and desired by its founder, is a further development of Judaism."⁷¹ Others depicted Free Religion as an equal confluence of Jewish and Christian developments, such as the young rabbi Felix Adler, who shocked American Jews when he asked them to join and even lead the American Free Religious movement in 1873. After being shorn of his rabbinical duties, Adler

⁶⁹Theodor Mommsen, "Auch ein Wort über unser Judenthum," in *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*, 227.

⁷⁰These estimates are based on membership lists turned over to the police. LAB A. Pr. Br. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15041.

⁷¹Jacobson also stated that "the new edifice can rise up ever stronger and more world dominating" if it is built "on the ground of a general human moral system separated from Mosaic law and prepared for the world by Jesus." Ferdinand Kampe, *Geschichte der religiösen Bewegung der neueren Zeit* (Leipzig: Franz Wagner 1860), vol. 4, 32.

went on to become the president of the Free Religious Association of America and the founder of the Ethical Culture movement in the late 1870s.⁷²

Many factors contributed to Jewish conversion to Free Religion. For some, there was the practical desire to overcome legal restrictions. Particularly during the *Vormärz*, membership in Free Religion had helped Jews and non-Jews overcome obstacles to marriage.⁷³ In several instances, Jews who had previously converted to Christianity chose to join Free Religion, indicating perhaps that their initial Christian conversion had been a matter of social, marital, or professional necessity rather than of religious conviction.⁷⁴ In the early 1880s, most new Jewish members of the Berlin Free Religious Congregation came from outside Prussia, primarily from Russia. These members, for the most part merchants (*Kaufleute*), were never mentioned in police reports or in Free Religious publications, and seem to have taken no part in the life of the congregation.⁷⁵ Their assumption of a new confessional identity through membership in Free Religion was likely a ruse to evade the wave of police expulsions of Russian Jews that began in Berlin in 1881.⁷⁶

Most secularist Jews resisted conversion, however. In addition to the factors they shared with other liberals, such as fear of social stigma or professional disadvantage, some Jews, such as Ferdinand Falkson, stated that they did not join Free Religion due to their "moral obligation [. . .] to stay with the oppressed comrades."⁷⁷

⁷²Cited in Horace Friess, *Felix Adler and Ethical Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 37. See also Howard Radest, "Ethical Culture," in *The Encyclopaedia of Unbelief*, Vol.1, ed. Gordon Stein (New York: Prometheus Books, 1985), 169–174.

⁷³Police actively investigated mixed marriages during the repression of the Free Religious movement in the 1850s. In some cases these marriages were nullified and any children declared bastards. In 1870, a Jewish-dissident couple from Ratibor had been able to overturn a court ruling barring their marriage. The Free Religious press celebrated this decision: "Simple reason makes clear: if dissidents have the right to civil marriage, and if Jews are compelled to civil marriage, then it is self-evident that Jews and dissidents can conclude marriages among themselves." This opened the way for marriages of Jews and Christians. Christians merely had to leave the church to marry Jews, "even if a hundred pastors or rabbis shake their heads." *Uhlich's Sonntagsblatt*, vol. 21, no. 44 (Oct. 30, 1870): 176.

⁷⁴In early 1863 two Protestants from prominent Jewish families joined the Berlin Free Religious Congregation: Cäcilia Bab, nee Mendelsohn, and the chemist Dr. Gustav Jacobson, who was a parliamentary candidate for the Nationalverein. LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15041, 17. On Jacobson, see Toury, *Politischen Orientierungen*, 59.

⁷⁵See police reports and the lists of new members sent to police between the 1860s and 1880s. LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, nos. 15041–48.

⁷⁶The expulsion of Russian Jews from Berlin began in 1881 and continued up until the early 1900s. In spring and summer 1884, for instance, 667 Russians, primarily Jews, were expelled from Berlin. Some 4,000 more Russian Jews were expelled in the early 1900s. See Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Antisemitism, 1870–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 163. Estimates of the total number of Jews expelled from Prussia between 1880 and 1888 vary from 10,000 to 20,000. Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 48.

⁷⁷Sylvia Paletschek, *Frauen und Dissens. Frauen im Deutschkatholizismus und in den freien Gemeinden 1841–1852* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 43. Falkson's struggle for official

Coinciding with the Berlin Antisemitism Controversy, the entry of Berlin Jews into Free Religion dropped.⁷⁸ Antisemitism compelled many Jews to reaffirm their confessional identities, a painful step for those liberals who felt they had surpassed traditional religion. Georg Brandes, a Jewish-Danish journalist and perceptive observer of Berlin society, noted in January 1881 that in the freethinking era of the 1870s, many Jews “had so completely forgotten their Judaism, that, as one put it ironically during a meeting, only now did they truly ‘become Jews—by the grace of Stoecker.’”⁷⁹ The following year, Fritz Mauthner, like Brandes a foreign-born Jewish writer with secularist affinities, published a novel, *Der neue Ahasver*, about a Jew who wanted to convert to Protestantism, but was prevented from doing so by antisemitism. In a letter to Theodor Mommsen reprinted as a preface to this novel, Mauthner explained that now more than ever, conversion was no means of countering antisemitism. Just as “no German moved to Paris during the war,” it would be cowardly for German Jews to abandon the field of battle through conversion.⁸⁰ After 1880 Jews who officially left the Jewish “confession” and joined Free Religion tended to “convert” to socialism at the same time (i.e., they became completely oppositional). The dropping off of conversion does not mean, however, that liberal Jews had lost interest in organized secularism.

Freethought

A particularly rich case for investigating the relationship of Jewish and Non-Jewish secularism is provided by the Berlin Freethought Association Lessing, which was founded in May 1881 by Wilhelm Loewenthal, a Jewish physician, social hygienist, and writer. A police lieutenant conjectured that “apparently

recognition of his marriage to a Christian was an important political event for Königsberg’s prerevolutionary left. Toury, *Politischen Orientierungen*, 53.

⁷⁸ The drop in conversions of Jews to Free Religion coincides with an overall drop in *Austritte* from the Jewish congregations of Berlin. Peter Honigmann has shown that after a peak following the 1873 May Law that eased church-leaving, the number of converts and *Austritte* in Berlin dropped as a percentage of the Jewish population and did not climb again until the late 1880s. Peter Honigmann, *Die Austritte aus der jüdischen Gemeinde Berlin 1873–1941. Statistische Auswertung und Interpretation* (Frankfurt am Main: 1988), 78.

⁷⁹ Georg Brandes, *Berlin als deutsche Reichshauptstadt. Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1877–1883*, trans. Peter Urban-Halle (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1989), 394.

⁸⁰ As a language philosopher, Mauthner was also aware of the contradiction between personal Bekenntnis and public Konfession. A Bekenntnis to a religion based on a dogma was not compatible with modern culture. He asked “[w]hich confession has a dogma broad enough for one [. . .] who has lost his old faith through science?” And he answered that a belief system acceptable to an educated individual would necessarily fail to attract an entire nation, because “the greater the content of a category the smaller is its reach! That is an old axiom of logic. And only a faith that can be expressed in the shortest definition can unite the greatest number of confessors.” Fritz Mauthner, “An Theodor Mommsen,” in *Der neue Ahasver. Roman aus Jung-Berlin* (Dresden and Leipzig: Heinrich Minden, 1882), 9.

we are dealing with the establishment of a type of Jewish Masonic lodge." This was an overstatement. While a majority of its initial fifty-six members appear to have been Jewish, the association attracted a number of non-Jewish notables to its ranks, including writer Robert Schweichel and later the editor Georg Ledebour. Among prominent Jews were the editor and social activist Lina Morgenstern, the founder of Germany's liberal unions Max Hirsch, and the famous cultural critic and later Zionist Max Nordau.⁸¹ The patron of the association, who declined election as chairman, was Eduard Lasker, the most important liberal Jewish politician of the nineteenth century. He had been personally responsible for leading his party's legislative efforts in the 1860s and 1870s. Given his refusal to sell out his liberal principles as Treitschke had, Lasker became a bitter opponent of Bismarck's conservative-clerical coalition of the 1880s.

That the Free Religious Congregation had only a small minority of Jews while Jews initially constituted the majority of Lessing points to different social and political milieus from which each association recruited. In 1881, the Berlin Free Religious Congregation was situated politically between the radical democratic and socialist movements and drew increasingly from the lower-middle class and the mass trades that were then drifting into the socialist camp. The students, journalists, merchants, and professionals that initially joined the Freethought Association Lessing represented those segments of the urban middle class, in which most Berlin Jews found themselves; it was politically dominated by the liberal parties.⁸²

That does not fully explain the obvious preference of liberal Berlin Jews for Freethought. We must also account for the different positions taken by the organizations on the problem of confession and conversion. At the outset the Freethinkers were at pains to cast their organization as more secular than Free Religion, to which "the eggshells of its clerical origin" still visibly clung.⁸³ Max Nordau, who was both a corresponding member of Lessing and a participant in the founding congress of the German Freethought League, accused Free Religion of being too caught up in "the habits of confessionalism" and argued that the truly modern, independent man of science had moved beyond the

⁸¹LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15130, 4, 10.

⁸²The initial membership list turned over the police contained the names of twenty-five merchants, seven newspaper editors, five students, six women without occupations, three writers with university degrees, two medical doctors, two bankers, one factory owner, and one *Inspektor*. The Jewish identity of most of these individuals is suggested by last names. Among Berlin newspaper editors were Rudolf Elcho (*Berliner Volkszeitung*), Max Schonau, Ferdinand Gilles, Hugo Polke, G. Lewinstein, Lina Morgenstern (*Hausfrauen-Zeitung*), Hardwig Köhler-Kegel, (*Deutschen Arbeiter-Auslandes*). Georg Ledebour (*Völkzeitung*) joined in 1883. LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15130, 10.

⁸³*Menschenhum*, no. 10 (1881): 70. This formulation came in a statement by editor August Specht, who cofounded the German Freethought League with the materialist Ludwig Büchner.

need for such religious forms.⁸⁴ Despite such radical posturing, there was, however, a conservative element in the Freethought position on confession. Freethinkers rejected calls to have members leave the state churches, not because they had already overcome confession, but because they, as liberal bourgeois men, did not want to be forced to give up their respective confessions. Becoming “confessionless” in Germany was a state act that was tantamount to declaring one’s allegiance to Free Religion. Because of the social costs of such a step, most liberal members of Free Thought remained official members of the churches and synagogues.

It may be assumed then that the Berlin Jews who joined Lessing hoped to find in Freethought an adequate vehicle for responding to the problems of confession-alism and antisemitism without having to renounce the confessional identity important to them as liberals and as Jews. Nonetheless, the “Jewish Question” of German secularism appeared here, too, refracted in debates carried out between Wilhelm Loewenthal and representatives of the largely non-Jewish national leadership of Freethought over the question of whether Freethought implied acceptance of naturalistic monism as a universal worldview.

This division had already become manifest in the founding congress of the German Freethought League in April 1881, when Loewenthal asked the delegates formally to adopt a clear statement on “tolerance,” in part to counteract the accusation made by some that Freethinkers erected dogmas of their own, “for example, the dogma of Darwinism.” The delegates in Frankfurt rejected Loewenthal’s proposal with the explanation that tolerance “is self-evident” for Freethinkers. Religious tolerance was, however, not self-evident for most Freethinkers, who, while they may have supported freedom of conscience in principle, remained intolerant of the survival of any religious dogmas alongside their humanist, monist, natural-scientific Weltanschauung. When Center Party leader Ludwig Windthorst argued in parliament in 1880 that Catholics deserved full tolerance because they fought for truth just much as liberals, the editor of the Freethinker’s house journal *Mensenthum* called it an “audacious slap in the face of truth.” For, he continued, “intolerance is not a daughter of truth, but a daughter of lies and error. Real truth is—as Feuerbach says—tolerant, because it is sure of itself, because it knows that at bottom nothing can oppose it, because it recognizes itself in the other, also in error, because it is convinced that life can represent the infinite unity of being only in infinite multiplicity and difference.”⁸⁵ For the Freethinker, then, religions could be tolerated by positivist science as long as they did not claim to be true.

⁸⁴Max Nordau, *Die conventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit*, vol. 14 (Leipzig: B. Elischer Nachf., 1889), 35.

⁸⁵“Glossen zu einer Kulturkampf-Debatte im preußischen Abgeordnetenhaus,” *Mensenthum* 9, no. 27 (July 4, 1880): 109–111.

The rejection of Loewenthal's resolution on tolerance also corresponded to the failure of national Freethought to commit itself publicly to the defense of the communal rights of Jews in Germany. Numerous articles were published on the "Jewish Question" in *Menschenium*. While uniformly condemning antisemitism, many of these articles began with caveats that let the reader know that the author acknowledged the grievances of their antisemitic opponents. Some intimated, in a philosemitic fashion, that the solution to antisemitism was for Jews to cease to be Jews.⁸⁶ Freethinkers, and later monists, portrayed the adoption of a positivist, materialist-monist worldview as an honorable way for Jews to exit their "confession."⁸⁷

The connection of intolerance and worldview became clear in an exchange between Loewenthal and his organization's vice chairman, the master-builder Gustav Kessler. In early 1882 Loewenthal gave a speech in which he argued that "all religion comes together in one point, thus religion must be universal, all confessions must have the same rights, none may rise above the other." He demanded "coexistence on an entirely religious, but confessionless foundation."

In the discussion that followed, Kessler objected to this view and suggested that others in the association shared his opinion that "'God' [is] a hypothesis that is not necessary" and took instead a viewpoint "based on force and matter [that] can disregard religiosity." Trying to placate his opponent, Loewenthal offered a definition of religion as "simply the worship of the unknown in the undiscovered universe. God as a personal, harshly punishing God—he naturally did not share this childish viewpoint." But Kessler persevered; he was not willing to agree to "these hazy conceptions of religion and God." This for him was too soft, too conciliatory: "If everything that is ideal is to be God, this he could support, but a certain religion, a positive God, who stands above nature, that he denies. The priests have packaged up morality as religion with great cleverness to secure their influence and dominion."

This exchange reveals the ongoing tension within the secularist camp between materialist and idealist versions of monism. Kessler's reference to Büchner's book *Force and Matter* and his crude anticlericalism place him in the camp of the materialists, while Loewenthal's understanding of religion as a positive form

⁸⁶Several articles appeared in *Menschenium* in 1880 and 1881 that conformed to Schaefer's philosemitism. They saw in antisemitism an attack on "freedom of thought" and "modern progress." While condemning the "Judenhetze," one writer cautioned readers not to be blind to the many shortcomings of the Jews, "which do not appear sympathetic to the Germanic spirit and temperament." Fritz Schütz, the former editor of *Menschenium* who had since emigrated to the United States, reported on his disputation with a Reformed rabbi in Milwaukee, in which the rabbi finally confessed not to believe in God. The fact that he still prayed was, for Schütz, proof of the external nature of the Jewish religion with its obedience to empty laws. A. Naumann, "Der Echte Ring," Oct. 10–17, 1880, 194–195; Anonymous, "Zur Judenhetze," April 17, 1881; Schütz, "Reformjudenthum," Feb. 6, 1881, 61–62.

⁸⁷See, for example, Edgar Herbst, "Bedenken gegen den Austritt aus der Religionsgemeinschaft unter den Juden," *Das monistische Jahrhundert* 2, no. 41 (Jan. 10, 1914): 1166–1169.

of human self-understanding and spiritual development echoes his identification with D. F. Strauss and suggests an affinity with contemporary neo-Kantian philosophers such as Hermann Cohen and Alois Riehl, both of whom were later active in the Ethical Culture movement.⁸⁸

In addition to their different political trajectories (Kessler soon outed himself as a “red” Democrat and eventually joined the SPD, while Loewenthal went on to support Max Hirsch’s antisocialist workers’ movement), the two men were divided by their anti-confessional perspectives. Kessler’s resolute demand for a single worldview corresponded to the philosemitic expectation of national Freethought that Jews should abandon their religion as a means of overcoming Jewish difference.⁸⁹ Against this worldview, Loewenthal proposed ethics as a system that remained pluralist even while it sought to satisfy the positivist requirements of the age.

Loewenthal’s hostility to exclusive worldview was a relatively new development that coincided with the rise of antisemitism. In his book *Confessionless Religion* of 1877, Loewenthal had revealed himself as a strident Kulturkämpfer who gloried in a coming “struggle for existence” between “the advocates of science and free thought” and the representatives of other confessions. He envisioned the formation of small congregations of “spiritually and socially high-standing men” who would “build the solid tree trunk from which must spring glorious buds, [and] destroying the indolence of half-thinking on its victory march, lead the good and the weak on the same righteous path [. . .] and eventually bring the thoughtless mass to knowledge and thus to true life.”⁹⁰

When Loewenthal launched the Lessing Association in 1881, he was clearly seeking to implement this elitist model for change, as he was through his ongoing involvement in freemasonry. But he was now taking aim rather less at the confessions and rather more at confessional thinking within the secularist camp. A clear indication of this shift was the redefinition of the theme for an

⁸⁸Volkhard Krech, “From Historicism to Functionalism: The Rise of Scientific Approaches to Religions around 1900 and their Socio-Cultural Context,” *Numen* 47, no. 3 (2000): 252–253.

⁸⁹Some Jewish freethinkers, such as Max Nordau, were ardent advocates of this worldview, and others sought to establish a Jewish pedigree in its production, most often by holding up Spinoza’s substance theory as the first concrete expression of philosophical monism. Freethinkers Waldeck Manasse, Jakob Stern, and Benno Borchardt wrote and lectured on Spinoza. Alexander Bragin made Spinoza the focal point of an entire freigeistig tradition of Jewish thought with ancient origins: “The fire once lit did not extinguish; it smoldered throughout the entire post-Talmudic era, it sparked up in Abraham Ibn Ezra, and become a blinding flame in the person of Baruch Spinoza.” Alexander Bragin, *Die freireligiösen Strömungen im alten Judenthume. Ein Beitrag zur jüdischen Religionsphilosophie* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1896), 79. A former rabbi, Jakob Stern (1843–1911) found a bridge between Judaism and atheism in Spinoza’s substance theory, of which he was the SPD’s foremost scholar. Jakob Stern and Heiner Jestrabek, *Vom Rabbiner zum Atheisten: ausgewählte religionskritische Schriften* (Aschaffenburg: Berlin: IBDK-Verl., 1997). On Spinoza’s influence in secularist circles, see Tracie Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 188–193.

⁹⁰Wilhelm Loewenthal, *Die confessionslose Religion* (Berlin: Elwin Staude, 1877), XIV.

international essay contest sponsored by the Lessing Association. When the contest was first announced in June 1881, the theme was "the best principles of a unified worldview based on logical premises." The term "unified worldview" was so overdetermined by that point that the contest would almost certainly have harvested numerous proposals for a positivist, monist system with an anticlerical orientation. In December of the same year, Loewenthal declared that the theme had been changed to "the best formulation of moral laws to guide conduct in the relations of human life."⁹¹ This switch was in keeping with "[t]he main task of the association," which Loewenthal defined as "the struggle against every brutalization whether of belief or nonbelief."⁹²

Loewenthal did not leave behind any lengthy elaborations of his own science of ethics, but it is clear that, despite his criticisms of dogmatic Darwinism, the theory of evolution furnished him with the scientific and temporal undergirding to which he could affix both the differentiations of religions and their future convergence in a science of ethics. According to Max Nordau, Loewenthal understood religion to be a product of man's "prescient knowledge of the aim of evolution," making "the instinct of development—the indispensable base of all life and all knowledge—identical with the religious need."⁹³

Ethical science was, for Loewenthal, the point at which the dialectic between the social drives of humanity and its evolving religious conceptions became a conscious process. In his 1887 textbook on the educational dimension of social hygiene, Loewenthal called the aim of ethical instruction in schools "to perfect as much as possible the person in the framework of his human essence, to raise him in the consciousness of his relationship to the whole, [and] as much as possible to make him, as one can put it, ideal-like, godlike."⁹⁴ Thus, rather than reject religion, Loewenthal saw it as the crucial arena for the development of human society.

The historical record does not allow us to delve deeper into Loewenthal's conception of "real idealism" (which he also referred to as "ideo-realism") as a science that would produce ethics from the empirical study of the history of religion within a developmental model of human society. There are other, better-known professional philosophers who elaborated ethics in the terrain between positivism and Kantian idealism to greater effect. What Loewenthal's combination of practical and theoretical work does show, however, is how much the discourse of ethics owed to the efforts of many liberals, and particularly the

⁹¹The contest was advertised internationally, and contestants were allowed to submit essays in English, French, Italian, or German. *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* (1882): 141.

⁹²Police report on meeting of Dec. 2, 1881, LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15130, 26.

⁹³Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895), 338.

⁹⁴Wilhelm Loewenthal, *Grundzüge einer Hygiene des Unterrichts* (Weisbaden: J. F. Bergmann, 1887), 103.

Jews among them, to find a means of overcoming confessional division through science that did not eradicate the right to subjective affiliation with religious and cultural communities. As such, it points to the importance of secular Jewish responses to antisemitism, philosemitism, and secularism in the emergence of the discourse of ethics in the 1880s.⁹⁵

The Convergence of the Lessing Association with National Freethought

In the end, Loewenthal's effort to build Berlin Freethought upon a foundation of tolerance and ethics failed, and by 1884 the Lessing Association was moving lock-step with the national leadership. By this time most of the original notable members of Lessing no longer appeared at meetings. The organization was still recruiting many Jews, but overall its confessional and social profile was changing. Non-Jews began to predominate, and representatives of professions previously absent, such as craftsmen and even workers, appeared on the rolls. The simmering down of the "Antisemitism Controversy" in 1882 and 1883 may have lessened the perceived need of Jewish secularists to have Freethought respond directly to the issues raised by antisemitism. At the same time, concern for the international plight of Jews, particular in Russia, where bloody pogroms had begun in 1881, may have contributed to a weakening of some Jewish members' interest in secularism as a means of countering persecution. In 1882 police noted the high interest of Lessing members in the "Relief Committee" to aid Russian Jews, which was probably related to the Berlin branch office of the Alliance Israélite Universelle that coordinated care and transport for fleeing Jews.⁹⁶ By the early 1890s Loewenthal and fellow former Lessing member Sigismund Simmel had joined the Alliance and played an active role in the Jewish Colonization Society founded by Baron Maurice de Hirsch. On behalf of Hirsch, Loewenthal traveled to Argentina, where he purchased land to settle Russian Jewish refugees.⁹⁷

In May 1885 the apothecary Otto Friederici assumed leadership of the organization. He had recently become a member of the Free Religious Congregation

⁹⁵Against such contextual aspects of the Jewish contribution to secular philosophies, David Biale has stressed the deep historical roots of secularism in medieval and early modern Jewish thought. David Biale, "Not in the Heavens: The Premodern Roots of Jewish Secularism," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 3 (2008): 340–364.

⁹⁶Police extract, Berlin, May 24, 1882, LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15130, 87. Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers*, 171.

⁹⁷One of the Jewish settlers later recalled the impression that Loewenthal made during his mission to Argentina: "I shall never forget the figure cut by that tall, stately Jew with mesmerizing black eyes, whose gaze none of us could bear for more than an instant." Alan Astro, *Yiddish South of the Border* (University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 19. Had he not died suddenly in 1894 at the age of 44, it is plausible that Loewenthal might have moved, as his friend Nordau did, in a secular Zionist direction.

and soon advanced to head that organization as well, serving as chairman of both organizations until Lessing was dissolved under police pressure in April 1887. Under Friederici, the Berlin Freethinkers moved to a more aggressive anticlericalism. Increasingly the lectures were constructed around the stark contrast of dogmatic religion and modern popular science. The visiting head of the *Deutsche Freidenkerbund*, Ludwig Büchner, drew a crowd of 700 to his speech on "the religious and the scientific view of the world [*Weltauffassung*]" in March 1886, in which he claimed that "[t]he conflict between religion and science is presently so great that a crisis is unavoidable. The blinders have fallen from the eyes of humanity and the political conditions will emerge, where no one will need to hesitate to speak his opinion freely." He closed with an appeal to democratic humanism: "The atheist also believes in a God, not a wrathful one, but rather in universal humanity. The last goal of our spiritual movement is [expressed in] five words: freedom, education, prosperity for all."⁹⁸

The German Society for Ethical Culture

Although defeated within Freethought and Free Religion, the banner of ethics was carried forward by, among others, Georg von Gizycki, the Berlin University philosopher who had won the 1882 Lessing essay competition. Gizycki joined with the Court Astronomer Wilhelm Foerster to spearhead the formation of a new organization in Berlin in October 1892 that made ethics its core mission: the German Society for Ethical Culture (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur*, or DGEK).⁹⁹ As Foerster later recalled, two events of 1891 prompted them to begin exploratory meetings with "a number of high-minded Jewish men."¹⁰⁰ The first event was the visit to Berlin by Felix Adler, who was promoting Ethical Culture as an international movement. The second was the controversial draft Prussian School Law proposed by the new Minister of Culture von Zedlitz-Trützschler. By codifying and extending the de facto reconsecration of the public schools that had followed Falk's

⁹⁸LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, no. 15130, 225.

⁹⁹Georg von Gizycki, *Grundzüge der Moral. Gekrönte Preisschrift* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich Königliche Buchhandlung, 1883). Gizycki's 1875 dissertation reveals his early interest in the philosophical consequences of natural science: Georg von Gizycki, *Versuch über die philosophischen Konsequenzen der Goethe-Lamarck-Darwin'schen Evolutionstheorie. Inaugural-Dissertation* (Berlin: Carl Lindow, 1875). For a history of debates over ethics that begins with the founding of the DGEK, see Matysik, *Reforming*.

¹⁰⁰Wilhelm Foerster, *Lebenserinnerungen und Lebenshoffnungen (1832 bis 1910)* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911), 226. Both Foerster and Gizycki had connections to the secularist scene. Foerster remembered that his father "was a warm supporter of the 'lichtfreundlich' movement." Foerster, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 13. Among the prominent Jewish founders of the DGEK were Hermann Cohen, Max Hirsch, and Samuel Kristeller. Kristeller helped organize Jewish opposition to antisemitism in the form of the "Jewish Committee of December 1, 1880" and became the president of the *Gemeindebund*, which Ismar Schorsch called the "first successful attempt to create a national organization" of German Jewry. Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions*, 61.

demission in 1879, Zedlitz's law would have had particularly negative consequences for liberal Jews, who did not want their children segregated in Jewish schools.¹⁰¹ Thus, like the Lessing Association, the formation of the DGEK was prompted by a conservative assault on secular traditions that contained within it an antisemitic barb.

Unlike Freethought and Free Religion, the DGEK represented a new type of organization that meant to influence German society, religion, and politics from the highest social echelons. It self-consciously stylized itself as an "aristocracy of the spirit," and in the list of thirty-two original members, a number of prominent professors were intermingled with representatives of true aristocracy. These elites clashed with more plebian Berlin secularists at the founding meetings of the organization in October 1892, which were open to the public but for which voting privileges were restricted to registered members.¹⁰² The differences of opinion on worldview and religious tolerance that had separated Loewenthal and Kessler and yet been contained within Freethought now provided the conceptual framework by means of which Ethical Culture defined and defended itself against the mainstream of organized German secularism.

In a programmatic speech to the founders, the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, one of the key figures of the DGEK, proposed that a science of ethics could serve as a common basis for moral action that would encompass rather than eliminate the various confessions. He proposed that the DGEK accept adherents of all religions and Weltanschauungen, who acknowledged as "a scientific truth" that "morality was independent of religion, superior to it, and did not necessarily develop through it." This meant that "the atheist could be just as moral or even more [moral] than the adherent of any faith in God."¹⁰³

The secularists present promptly attacked Tönnies for his idealistic belief that a science of religion might lead the reactionary churches or classes to abandon their grip on key institutions. The Social Democratic city councillor and leading member of the Berlin Free Religious Congregation, Ewald Vogtherr, denied the possibility of overcoming confessional division by mere

¹⁰¹As Marjorie Lamberti noted, the intended prohibition of the nonconfessional schools (*Simultanschulen*) favored by secularists and dissidents would have affected Jews in particular, as the bill foresaw dividing all schools between the two major Christian confessions. Most Jewish parents were not in favor of adding separate Jewish confessional schools to the bill, as this would have meant the segregation of their children. Marjorie Lamberti, *Jewish Activism in Imperial Germany: The Struggle for Civic Equality* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 126. In 1891 91.2 percent of all Catholic children and 95.6 percent of all evangelical, but only 31.2 percent of all Jewish children received instruction in a public school of their own confession. The push for greater clerical influence over the schools was in keeping with the Cabinet Order of May 1, 1889, which expressed the new emperor's wish to "make the elementary schools useful in counteracting the spread of socialist and communist ideas." Marjorie Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 96, 157.

¹⁰²*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 20, 1892): 5.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 8–10.

liberal tolerance. "[T]he Society will have to show its colors regarding the confessions," he demanded. "Either Protestant, Catholic, Jew, or none of the three!"¹⁰⁴ This outburst sums up the dominant secularist position on confession-
alism. It called for strict anticlericalism to disempower or destroy the confessions rather than fuse them via ethics, while at the same time constituting secularism *ex negativo* as a partisan formation within the struggle of the confessions.

The "German Darwin" and later founder of the Monist League, Professor Ernst Haeckel appeared on the third day and argued similarly for the clear division of ethics from traditional religion, for "[o]nly ethics is religion for us!" In his eyes, scientific ethics was identical with scientific *Weltanschauung*, and the practical path to the promotion of ethics lay in an intensification of the anticlerical struggle.¹⁰⁵

Wilhelm Foerster responded critically to Haeckel with the words "[w]hen it comes to *Weltanschauung*, we all get a little jittery." Though willing to "greet Prof. Haeckel as a brother *in ethicis*, he was in no way in agreement with his worldview." The following day, Foerster unrolled a criticism of worldviews from an ethical perspective, accusing them of contributing to rather than solving the confessional and party-political division of society. Whether economic or natural scientific (i.e., Marxist or monist), worldviews necessarily provided the false answer to the "social question," which he called the "riddle of the sphinx." Only a nonpartisan ethical position could address the suffering of the masses without preparing the ground for socialist revolution. "[A]s can be proven historically," he concluded, "a philosophical or natural-scientific worldview in no way guards against a return of [inquisitorial] atrocities, rather only the cultivation of true humanity, the feeling of solidarity with the happiness and suffering of all."¹⁰⁶

Despite its critique of worldview, Ethical Culture manifested the same tensions over philosemitism as the other secularist organizations examined thus far. In his first public talk after the founding of the DGEK, Wilhelm Foerster spoke on "the ethics of nationalism and the Jewish question," telling listeners why he considered Jewish participation of vital importance to the success of the DGEK. Antisemitism was a manifestation of the contemporary malaise inflicted on Germany by chauvinistic, militaristic nationalism and reconciliation with Jews would be a key part of its cure. At the same time, he believed the Jews were equally in need of a cure. He equated Jewish separatism with exclusive Jewish nationalism and declared that "as supporters of ethical culture, we call to the Jews: do not organize among yourselves, rather join with us against all evil, also in your own ranks, against German and against Jewish nationalism." Foerster rejected the proposal brought up in the discussion that the DGEK issue a

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 20.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 21, 28–29.

declaration against antisemitism. This would “have no great value for the outer [world], because the Society and this meeting are made up in large measure of Jews, as he expressly recognizes and welcomes.”¹⁰⁷ While the conservative press indeed interpreted the DGEK as a front for liberal-Jewish anticlericalism, Foerster’s statements again demonstrate the ambiguity that constituted secularist philosemitism.¹⁰⁸

Ethical Culture addressed the confessional quandary of freethinking liberals who wished to overcome confessionalism without abandoning their respective confessions. An ethics produced through the comparative analysis of the moral content of different religions would rise above religion. It promised a means of modernizing the religions and ending confessional struggle between them without calling on one to submit to the other. (The ethicists were decidedly less ecumenical in their treatment of “primitive” religions, which were at that time widely interpreted as inferior antecedents to monotheistic religions). Science or the scientific method appeared as the mediator and new authority.¹⁰⁹ Confessional affiliation, so essential to the social honor of nineteenth-century liberals, remained untouched. By subjugating Darwinian-inspired natural scientific Weltanschauung and socialist Weltanschauung to the same conditions as the churches, ethics managed to appear as a new liberal perspective “above the parties.”¹¹⁰

Conclusion

The conflation of the “Jewish Question” with the question of secularism was not unique to Germany, although the confessional context through which it was negotiated largely was. The strong shaping that Friedrich Wilhelm IV gave rationalist Christian dissent in the 1840s brought this forerunner of modern secularism

¹⁰⁷Participants in the discussion included, [G. S.?] Schaefer, Engel, Obert von Gizycki, Schriftsteller Stern, Prof. Löw, S. Kristeller, Sanitäts-Rat Zimmermann, Dr. Lütgenau, Dr. Max Hirsch, Dr. Albert Levy, and Jaffe. *Mitteilungen* 1, no. 2 (March 2, 1893): 48–49.

¹⁰⁸*Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, October 28, 1892. The article suggested that the liberal Jewish leadership of the DGEK had initially used the reputation of prominent non-Jewish figures as figureheads and subsequently discarded them. See the comments by DGEK cofounder on such antisemitic argumentation in Ferdinand Tönnies, *Nietzsche-Narren in der “Zukunft” und in der “Gegenwart,”* vol. 1, “*Ethische Cultur*” und ihr Geleite (Berlin: Ferd. Däumlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1893), 32. On antisemitic inflections of the animal rights debate in the early DGEK, see Matysik, *Reforming*, 35–38.

¹⁰⁹On the third meeting day, Foerster said, “we want to ethicize the churches. That will not happen quickly, we are the weak ones at present, and they have more power than ever. We do not want to allow ourselves to be drawn into enmity and also not forget what religion contributed and still contributes to cultural development.” *Mitteilungen* 1, no. 1: 22, 23.

¹¹⁰The phrase “above the parties” was key trope of German political discourse and was regularly invoked by the monarchy, the churches, and the liberal parties. For historian James Sheehan, its use by liberals reflected distaste for partisan politics that contributed to the weakness of the democracy in Imperial Germany. See James Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the 19th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

close to the legal status of the Jews. The struggle for the emancipation of these two confessional outsiders became widely conjoined in the minds of supporters, opponents, and state officials alike and formed part of the backdrop to the emergence of antisemitism in the 1870s. In that decade, "godless Jewry" became a central metaphor in the conservative-nationalist cultural code and one that gave voice to shared opposition to the forces of secularism and secularization unleashed in the Kulturkampf. Antisecularism and not just traditional Christian Judenhass provided the religious glue that held together the heterogeneous alliance of antisemites.

Most secularists would have affirmed Shulamit Volkov's claim that antisemitism and emancipation became watchwords for two opposing political cultures of Imperial Germany. In keeping with the direction of recent studies of state secularization, however, this essay has shown that both sides of this cultural divide shared basic assumptions. All the key actors in the "Berlin Antisemitism Controversy" criticized Jews within the framework provided by the discourse of tolerance. Adolf Stoecker's opening salvo in 1879 was an admonishment to German Jews to be "a little more modest, a little more tolerant," while philosemites such as G. S. Schaefer and Theodor Mommsen spoke of Jewish "excesses." Even liberal Jewish critics of anti- and philosemitism such Hermann Cohen and Fritz Mauthner urged fellow Jews to assimilate more fully with German culture and eliminate their "negative peculiarities."¹¹¹

The "emancipation contract" lined up with the expectation that national unity would involve the overcoming of confession. Yet although this logic was widely shared across the political and religious spectrum, it did not lead to a binary ordering of religious conflict or to the extension of the hegemony of liberalism, as the recent studies noted in the introduction have suggested. Instead, each anticonfessional model and each solution to the "Jewish Question" deepened confessional antagonisms in Germany. This essay has examined three models.

By arguing that the bulk of German Jewry had switched its faith from monotheism to materialist humanism, antisemites sought to expose the universalist claims of both liberal secularity and radical organized secularism to be particularistic creeds that had no right to be tolerated. The response of philosemites such as G. S. Schaefer was to reassert the key tenets of liberalism, namely tolerance and the separation of church and state, while at the same time demanding Jewish assimilation within the secularist fold. This demand had always been present in

¹¹¹Hermann Cohen assured Treitschke that German Jews would continue to rid themselves of the "negative peculiarities" of their people. Cited in Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848–1933* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 100. In the mid-1880s, Mauthner had penned a novel set in his native Bohemia that described the heroic struggle of a sole Protestant German against the onslaught of crude, Catholic Czech nationalists. Between the fronts Mauthner placed an ambivalent turncoat in the form of the Jewish pub owner who speaks German but claims to be Czech when it suits him. Fritz Mauthner, *Der letzte Deutsche von Blatna* (Berlin: Ullstein, n.d.).

German secularism but became more urgent as anxieties of national disintegration spread across the political and religious spectrum in the wake of the Kulturkampf and its failure.

Those influential Berlin Jews who formed the Lessing association in 1881 believed that Freethought offered a means of upholding secularism without having to leave their confessional identification as Jews. Yet, even in Freethought liberal Jews were confronted with pressure to confess the materialist-monist worldview. Against this pressure, Wilhelm Loewenthal, and later the founders of the DGEK, promoted ethics. Ethics provided a second-order perspective that enabled them to analyze monist worldview in the same frame as religion. It is no coincidence that this decisive critique of worldview appeared in secularist organizations with a strong Jewish membership. According to literary scholar Aamir Mufti, the liminal position that Jews were assigned in the imagined national communities of the modern era destined Jewish intellectuals to be pre-eminent critics of the myths of nationalism.¹¹² The same appears to be true of the Jewish critics of secularist worldview. Whereas resistance to the exclusion of their community from the nation prompted Jewish thinkers to demystify and thereby “secularize” the nation (this is Mufti’s conclusion), resistance to philosemitism prompted Jewish Freethinkers and Ethicists to demystify monist worldview by revealing it to be as much dogma as science. In so doing, it may be said that they “secularized” radical secularism.

What is left out of Mufti’s account, however, is the degree to which Jewish critics engaged in the work of demystification in order to serve their own myth-making. While the Jewish and liberal Ethicists were able to expose Freethought and Free Religion as something of a “fourth confession,” it would be false to believe that the critics of worldview were “above the parties.” Jewish secularists were also trapped within the parameters established by the confessional order. The results were sometimes comical, as in the proposal made by Georg Zepler, a Jewish physician and sometimes socialist who led Berlin’s Union of the Confessionless (*Bund der Konfessionslosen*). Responding to the rising antisemitism of the waning years of World War I, Zepler proposed the following: “if the most personal interests of the individual are taken into account, the best solution to the Jewish question would result from the legal exit [*Austritt*] from Judaism and the legal entry [*Übertritt*] into confessionlessness. This entry implies no sacrifice of the intellect, as [is the case] with baptism.” The absurd twist came when Zepler then suggested that those Jews who did not want to reject their heritage could join together in a “society for confessionless [people] of Jewish

¹¹²Mufti, a scholar interested in modern Muslim critics of the secularism of the “Hindu” Indian state, sees himself working in a critical tradition that stands on the shoulders of Jewish thinkers from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno to Heinrich Heine and Moses Mendelssohn. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 89.

background," thus implicitly recreating confessional differences which confessionlessness was to eliminate.¹¹³

Despite his passionate advocacy of monism and anticlericalism, Max Nordau struck a pessimistic note when considering confessionlessness as a means for secular Jews to end discrimination. He recounted how the Austrian church-leaving law of 1869 had not only failed to damage the confessional system, but had ironically reinforced the connection of secularism and Judaism in the minds of antisemites. Those Jews who took advantage of the church-leaving law found that few Christians followed suit, making "confessionless and Jewish nearly synonymous." Thus, when students registering at the University of Vienna answered the usual question about religious affiliation with "confessionless!," the university registrar customarily responded "with a good-natured smile" and the comment, "Why didn't you just say straight out that you are a Jew!"¹¹⁴

Nor did ethics offer a way out. The discourse of ethics emerged not from a desire not to debunk the dream of national spiritual unity, but to reformulate it. Ethical Culture remained trapped, like Freethought and Free Religion, by the premise that a new and universal spiritual foundation beyond the competing confessions was necessary to produce national unity. By positing a unity prior or subsequent to the confessionally divided nation, anticonfessionalism of any stripe only exacerbated confessional tensions. The Jewish publicist Karl Kraus realized this at the end of the nineteenth century. Responding to a reader's suggestion that he use the pages of *Die Fackel* to promote a "confessionless religion" as a means of overcoming antisemitism and establishing religious peace, Kraus argued that even if one could dream up a "common religion of the educated" that mediated "between the teachings of all existing churches," it could never compete with real religions. Just as the artificial languages Volapük and Esperanto pretended to be "world languages" but lived in the shadow of international English, the "moral Volapük" of Ethical Culture destined it to remain a muddy sect, incomparable to the world religions that "actually unite wide segments of modern humanity."¹¹⁵

In the end, each model of overcoming confession within the secularist tradition was effectively reinscribed into the confessional system that it was too weak to dismantle. Beginning with the rational Christian dissent of the 1840s, proceeding to a monist-atheist Weltanschauung, and ending with a science of ethics, each of these failed solutions to the "confessional question" contained within it a failed solution to the "Jewish question."

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¹¹³ *Privatweg*, no. 2 (August 1918): 33.

¹¹⁴ Nordau, *Die conventionellen Lügen*, 34.

¹¹⁵ *Die Fackel*, no. 14 (August 1899): 16–17.